

HOMILY SUNDAY 34 - YEAR A

“Christ the King”

(Ezekiel 34:11-12, 15-17; Psalm 23; 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, 28; Matthew 25:31-46)

Marie-Louise Ternier-Gommers is from my home town of North Battleford. She once wrote a reflection on today’s gospel in the *Living With Christ*. In it she asks an interesting question: “What would our communities look like if we let the ones most in need determine our words and actions?”

She then states that all that counts in God’s kingdom is offering love, mercy and grace, in word and deed, towards the least among us.

All that is really important is love and caring shown to those most in need. Do we really believe this, we who call ourselves followers of Jesus? Do we live this? That is the gospel challenge today.

Imagine what our country would be like if we decided that the needs of the immigrants would be a national priority. Imagine what the city of Paris would look like if the French leaders decided that the needs of the poor, mostly Moslem youth became a national priority. Imagine what the world would look like if the rich G-8 nations had a summit and actually forgave the dept of the poor nations and in reality gave them the ability to become economically viable with guaranteed fair trade rules enforced. Is it not interesting that when the economy began to spiral, trillions of dollars were found to bail out the biggest of financial institutions? We can eliminate poverty. We simply need the will to do it. That will to change would usher in a world where the values of power, control and domination would be reversed. It would be the beginning of the reign of God among us.

That, my friends, is the revolutionary world that Jesus came to establish among us - the reign of God. That reign challenges and stretches us because we resist; we hang on to our privileges; we don’t want to let go of the comfortable status quo that we enjoy.

There are two tensions in the scriptures that are raised by today’s readings. One – are we saved by faith, or by works? And two – is Jesus present among us, never having left, or has Jesus ascended into heaven to come again at the parousia?

In terms of Jesus’ presence, Matthew does not have an ascension scene, but rather just a promise to be with us always to the end of time, because for him, Jesus is here, never having left, but there is a catch. It is true that Jesus is present, but he is most present in the poor; the neglected, the outcast among us – those most in need. That is where, for Matthew, Jesus can best be found.

So, if we want to find Jesus, touch Jesus, do something for Jesus, we must find, seek out, touch, do something for the poor, for those most needy among us. It is as simple as that, and it is that reaching out to the poor in compassionate love that builds the reign of God.

For Matthew, that is how we will be saved; how we will enter the reign of God. He says nothing about prayer, about doctrine and belief and faith, about being theologically correct. All he asks is have we cared for the most needy among us? Have we consistently to answer their physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual needs.

Matthew is not denying the role of faith and prayer or the fact that Jesus did ascend into heaven and will come again. He is simply saying, like St. James, that a faith that does not express itself in loving service is not really faith at all. And he is saying that the Jesus of history who died, rose again, ascended into heaven and will come again as Christ the glorious King, is still among us and most easily found in those most needy among us.

A striking note about the gospel is that both groups are unaware; both groups are taken by surprise! Those who did help the poor can't seem to remember when they did so. That is charity at its best; it is just part of life, the way we live, and does not draw attention to itself. Those who did not care for the poor are also not aware; they have just taken their good fortune for granted and ignored, not even seen the poor. An example of this is two altar boys fighting on the way to Church to see who would get to serve, not aware that they were hitting Jesus on the way to serve Jesus – failing to make that connection.

This gospel will always remain a challenge; one that will keep us growing and stretching to live it out, calling us to connect faith and life because it is so easy to settle for the status quo. We have to militate against that and work at loving and caring.

It can be a family breaking through the conspiracy of silence and starting to talk about the physical, verbal or sexual abuse that has happened among them. It can be parents spending quality time with their kids, assuring that their emotional needs are met.

It will be when I stop putting off affirming someone else or telling someone I love them until it is too late. It will be when a community honours the elders with a meal and a social gathering. This is truly living out the gospel that we just heard.

Mother Theresa of Calcutta puts it best: “What you would like to do for Jesus, whom you cannot see; do it for the person next to you whom who can see, and you will be doing it to Jesus.”

My Coat of Arms is my way of trying to help us all realize this gospel. At the bottom is my motto, Regnum Dei Intra Vos, The Kingdom of God is among you, taken from Luke 17:21. The Catholic wheel of life just above it symbolizes the dynamic process of our faith that involves Raema, Kononia, Liturgia and Diakonia. The Word of God (the bible) gathers us into community (the circle). We then celebrate who we are (the candle) and are sent out to serve all others in love (the symbol of Mary, the first disciple). It all leads to the essence of Christian life, which is loving service to the most needy – the heart of today's gospel and the heart of our faith.

To help this message enter more deeply into our minds and hearts, I have re-written the gospel as follows: “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry for love, and you sacrificed your afternoon to spend quality time with me; I was thirsting for affection, and you hugged me and told me you loved me; I was a stranger, lonesome and scared, and you welcomed me, introduced me to others, and gave me a sense of belonging; I was naked and ashamed, and you affirmed me; encouraged me to get my education, complimented me, and gave me dignity; I was sick, emotionally and physically, and you cared for me, listened to my pain, understood my problems, shared your own experience and

counselled me; I was in a prison of addiction, and you not only visited me, but also confronted me with tough love; helped me hit bottom and took me to a support group. Truly, I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.”

Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry for love, and you took advantage of me, abused me emotionally, physically and sexually, called me names and put me down; I was thirsting for affection, and you neglected me, ignored me, did nothing about your addiction and were always too busy to spend time with me; I was lonely, afraid, a stranger, and you laughed at me, told me I was not from this community, didn’t belong here and took away my rights; I felt naked, ashamed at my past, and you judged me, gossiped about me, laughed at me and never took time to find out what really had happened to me; I was sick and you left me to fend for myself, used my money to gamble, and never listened to me; I was in prison, physically and spiritually, and you misused public funds, ignored me, branded me hopeless, never prayed for me, and took my things. Truly, I tell you, just as you did or did not do it to one of the least of these, you did or did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is an experience of Jesus loving us once again, sharing himself with us. It is also a commitment for us to go and do like wise - to truly, practically, love others as he has loved us.

So remember, to enter into the kingdom of God, we must express love, mercy and grace to the most needy among us, just as Jesus did, and the kingdom is ours.